

Leader of Zapatistas ready to leave jungle to seek peace

BY WILL WEISERT
ASSOCIATED PRESS

LA REALIDAD, MEXICO — The first time he burst from the jungle it was to start a war that shook Mexico to its core and vaulted Indian rights to the top of the national agenda.

Now Subcomandante Marcos says he's ready to leave the Chiapas wilderness again in search of an agreement that could lock those rights into Mexico's constitution.

Responding to offers from new President Vicente Fox, the ski-masked leader of the Zapatista guerrillas announced he will travel to Mex-

ico City in February to lobby for an Indian rights bill Fox promises to introduce on Tuesday.

"We will go, and we will see what happens," Marcos told a news conference Saturday in this jungle hamlet that serves as a sort of rebel capital.

After Fox ordered government troops to pull back from roadblocks, the road to La Realidad showed only skeletons of army posts erected since the revolt: abandoned encampments of cinderblock and sandbags and wooden roadblocks that had been pushed to the side of winding dirt highways.

But if the peace moves were a quick triumph for Fox on his first full day as president Saturday,

profound complications remain.

The Zapatistas say they want further military pullbacks before talks can resume. Fox doesn't have the power of earlier presidents to force a bill through the now-divided Congress. And the rights bill is one of only several issues on the road to peace.

The Zapatista National Liberation Army emerged from the jungle on Jan. 1, 1994. The overwhelmingly Indian rebel force briefly captured six Chiapas towns.

A cease-fire took hold only 12 days later after more than 145 deaths.

But with peace talks stalled, low-level vio-

lence and instability have festered in Chiapas, with repeated clashes between pro- and anti-rebel factions.

The rebel demands mixed socialist economics with more passionate calls for democracy, development and respect for Mexico's long-oppressed Indians.

The only major peace agreement came in February 1996, when officials agreed to more autonomy for Indians nationwide. It was meant to be only one step toward a final accord.

Congressmen drew up a bill to enact the accord. The Zapatistas quickly agreed. But President Ernesto Zedillo balked, saying it would cre-

ate legal conflicts and endanger Mexico's sovereignty over its land and resources.

The president's counterproposal was rejected by the Zapatistas.

Fox's July 2 election, which ended 71 years of single-party rule, seemed to answer the rebel demand for greater democracy in Mexico. Zedillo's party also lost Chiapas' governorship in August elections.

While campaigning, Fox quipped that he would like to sit down with Marcos and end the Chiapas revolt "in 15 minutes."

Astronauts install solar wings on international space station

BY MARCIA DUNN
ASSOCIATED PRESS

CAPE CANAVERAL, FLA. — Two astronauts floated out of space shuttle Endeavour on Sunday to install the world's largest, most powerful set of solar wings on the international space station.

It was a task as monumental as the wings themselves: The future of space station construction hinged on the astronauts' ability to pull off the job and thus provide much needed power to the newly inhabited outpost.

Spacewalkers Joe Tanner and Carlos Noriega, who trained for more than three years for the flight, were needed to guide the \$600 million solar wings onto space station Alpha and bolt them down.

Canadian astronaut Marc Gameau, working from inside Endeavour, moved the folded wings 3 feet above the attachment spot with the use of the shuttle's robot arm. Then he waited for the spacewalkers to position themselves on either side of that spot, so they could give him directions for closing the final distance. With no direct view himself, Gameau needed their eyes. He also need-

ed their hands to drive the capture latches.

Before the wings could be unfurled to their full 240 feet and begin generating electricity, Tanner and Noriega had to release all the bolts and pins that were used to secure the payload for Thursday's launch aboard Endeavour.

The blue- and gold-colored wings, made of silicone cells and thin Kapton layers, were folded like an accordion for liftoff. They were to be commanded to open, one by one, with a few computer keystrokes by shuttle commander Brent Jett Jr.

Each wing was expected to take 13 minutes to spread.

Alpha's wings will be the largest structure ever deployed in space, and will cover half an acre. The bigger the wings, the more sunlight that can be collected for conversion into electricity.

Each wing is 38 feet wide and covered with 32,800 solar cells, and has power-storing batteries and radiators at the base. The combined wingspan — 240 feet — exceeds that of a Boeing 777 jetliner.

NASA expects the solar panels to generate 65 kilowatts at peak power,

four times what currently is produced by the small Russian-built solar wings already on the space station. Without this extra electricity, the space agency could not launch its Destiny science lab in January — or any other power-hungry pieces.

Alpha commander Bill Shepherd and his two Russian crewmates were mere observers to all the action 235 miles above Earth. The hatches between the docked spacecraft remained sealed because of the difference in cabin air pressure.

Two more spacewalks are planned this week by Tanner and Noriega, on Tuesday and Thursday, to finish wiring up the solar wings and to install other equipment on the space station. If all goes well, the two crews will get to meet Friday.

Sunday's spacewalk featured something new: helmets equipped with small cameras to provide live views of what the astronauts were seeing. They were dubbed "Joe-cam" and "Carlos-cam."

"We promise to make all of our movements nice and slow and steady so nobody gets sick looking at the pictures," Tanner said before the flight.

Sierra Leone crowds praise Annan, plead for protection from rebels

BY CLARENCE ROY-
MACAULAY
ASSOCIATED PRESS

PORT LOKO, SIERRA LEONE — Sixteen times in the past six months, this fishing and farming town has been attacked by a brutal rebel army that razed houses, raped women and kidnapped children.

On Sunday, crowds of Port Loko residents implored U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan to "deliver us from this bondage of war." Local leaders crowned him honorary successor to a legendary 19th century freedom fighter who defied British colonial rule.

Annan, on the second and last day of a visit to this West African nation, promised that "the U.N. will stick by Sierra Leoneans in these difficult times."

Thousands of cheering adults and children in school uniforms greeted Annan, waving white handkerchiefs and

singing in the Krio language. The crowds thronged around Annan and his wife, asking for assurances that the U.N. peace-keeping force in Sierra Leone plans to stay.

Since the Revolutionary United Front rebels launched Sierra Leone's civil war in 1991, the renegades have systematically murdered and maimed tens of thousands of defenseless civilians in a terror campaign to increase their influence. The RUF's signature atrocity is cutting off the hands, legs and lips of women, children and the elderly.

The U.N. chief flew by helicopter to Port Loko, a town on the edge of government-held territory some 45 miles northeast of the capital, Freetown. Nigerian U.N. peacekeepers are the main deterrent preventing yet another attack by rebels on the town, and the roads remain unsafe.

At a ceremony in a military tent,

local traditional leaders paid tribute to Annan's U.N. peace efforts by proclaiming him "honorary paramount chief Bai Bureh Kabelai II" after Sierra Leone's beloved warrior who fought British imperial rule in the late 1800's.

Kabelai was eventually captured and sent to prison in Gold Coast, now Ghana, where he died.

Annan met with a few of the 20,000 refugees living in makeshift tents made from plastic sheeting and sticks in a camp at the edge of town. Many of them had been driven from villages by the rebels and some told stories of rebels pillaging their homes, capturing young girls as sex slaves and boys as porters.

On Saturday, Annan renewed the world body's commitment to the U.N. peacekeeping force, which has been plagued by organizational troubles and has failed to stem rebel attacks against civilians.

Consumer groups want government to hold hearings 'lemon laundering'

BY NEDRA PICKLER
ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — The trouble began soon after Vicki and Joe Parisi bought their used car in 1994. The radio would go out. The power windows stopped working. The gas gauge incorrectly read empty.

Soon, the 1993 sedan needed a brake job, transmission repairs and major front end work. Then came the last straw: The car died while the Parisis traveled in the fast lane of a busy Ohio freeway.

When the Uniontown, Ohio, couple investigated, they discovered the car was a lemon that the manufacturer had bought back from an owner who had similar problems in New Jersey, a state that required the vehicle's title be stamped as a lemon.

The automaker did repair work and shipped it to Ohio, which at the time did not require title stamping but does now. The dealership got a new title in its name, effectively erasing the lemon stamp.

Consumer advocates say this "lemon laundering" is widespread, a claim the auto industry denies, and want the Federal Trade Commission to require automakers to tell consumers about their duds.

"If you are going to put your family in this car and travel at 70 mph down the road, you want to know if there is a history of problems."

Rosemary Shahan

Founder of Consumers for Auto Reliability and Safety

"If you are going to put your family in this car and travel at 70 mph down the road, you want to know if there is a history of problems," said Rosemary Shahan, founder of Consumers for Auto Reliability and Safety, a Sacramento, Calif.-based group working to improve lemon laws.

The FTC will wait to review the proposal before commenting, agency spokesman Mitch Katz said. "It's possible that this could be in our jurisdiction, but you are talking about a major resource investment," Katz said.

The FTC held hearings on lemons four years ago at the request of the consumer groups, but has not taken any action.

No one knows how many repurchases all the manufactures make, in part because different state laws make it hard to track buybacks. States have different definitions for a lemon, require varying levels of disclosure when the

vehicle is resold, and offer different ways for consumers to seek compensation.

In the Parisis' case, they successfully sued the automaker and the dealer, which has since gone out of business, after they refused to take the car back.

Some private companies, for a fee, will search a vehicle's history, but their data can be incomplete because of the differing state requirements.

Phil Nowicki, a consultant on lemon laws who used to head Florida's Lemon Law Arbitration Program, estimates that about 75,000 of the roughly 45 million used vehicles sold every year in the United States have been repurchased by the manufacturer under a lemon law decision or settlement. He believes few consumers are aware they have bought a repurchase vehicle.

"I'd say compared to two or three years ago, the industry has improved to some degree," Nowicki said.

CONGRESS

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his presidency nears its end, even some Democrats say privately that he would have little taste to spend his final White House days fighting such an effort by Republicans.

But others say returning lawmakers of both parties will be weary of the budget battle and eager to finish it so they can focus on next year.

Bipartisan bargainers agreed last month to a record \$7.9 billion increase in education spending — 20 percent above last year — that was later rejected by House GOP leaders.

Clinton used his radio address Saturday to demand that Congress make passing the education budget its top priority

in the lame-duck session. Hastert's spokesman renewed GOP objections over control of the money. "Republicans want more education dollars to go to the classrooms, not to Washington bureaucrats," John Feehery said.

Still, there were signs of possible progress.

White House spokesman Jake Siewert said administration officials "recognize we may have to set aside some of the more difficult disputes we were having" before Congress recessed.

Many officials saw that as a hint the White House might drop its demand for liberalizing immigration laws in exchange for Republicans ending their drive to block the workplace safety rules.

In addition, some Republicans talked about offering a 1 percent across-the-board cut in the \$114 billion portion of the education-labor bill that covers programs Congress must approve every year.

The rest of the \$350 billion measure covers automatically paid benefits like Medicaid.

Democrats were certain to consider that 1 percent reduction too high. Still, its mention by Republicans underscored that they were willing to trim the measure by a relatively small amount that would still allow record spending increases for hiring teachers, Pell grants for low-income college students, after-school centers and other programs.

Among the other matters awaiting Congress:

—\$30 billion in higher Medicare reimbursements for health care providers that Clinton wants changed because he says it is too generous to health-maintenance organizations.

—Presidential transition. A House subcommittee scheduled a hearing Monday on the government's refusal to release transition funds to Bush.

IRAQ OIL

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to maintain stability in world markets.

"We do not interfere in Iraq's policy," he told the Kuwait News Agency. "But ... we are concerned about this issue."

He did not say if Kuwait was prepared to increase its oil output, which is currently at around 2.14 million barrels a day. But Oil Minister Sheik Saud Nass-

er Al Sabah was quoted in the Al-Rai Al-Amm daily Sunday saying there was no need for a hike since the oil market "is currently saturated."

Rashid defended Iraq's price proposals, saying they are fair and in the interest of the Iraqi people. He blamed the United States for the oil stoppage and said U.N. overseers "are under political pressure."

The sanctions committee has said oil companies under new contracts can continue loading Iraqi crude onto tankers, but cannot pay for it until Iraq proposes

December prices that are in line with fair market value.

Rashid also said Iraq will consider extending the oil-for-food program for another phase once a resolution is issued at the U.N. Security Council, but called the deal a "failure" for not fulfilling its purpose.

"We have exported more than \$38 billion. Only \$8.5 billion worth of contracts have arrived," he said. "About \$3.5 billion worth of contracts are on hold while there is \$14-\$15 billion frozen in banks."

VENEZUELA

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lan Workers Confederation vowed civil disobedience if the government tries to oust leaders from their offices.

Chavez insists Venezuela's opposition-affiliated union leaders belong to a corrupt oligarchy he has vowed to dismantle. Over the years, many union leaders amassed personal fortunes while bank-

rupting a workers' bank created to safeguard union members' savings.

"What's more democratic than a referendum? When have workers here ever been consulted about their destiny?" Chavez said, after depositing his ballot in a voting center near the presidential mansion in Caracas.

A fiery nationalist and former army paratrooper who led a failed military coup in 1992, Chavez has stacked Congress, the Supreme Court and most state governments with his allies through a series of democratic elections and referendums.

His victories have left in shambles the two traditional parties that shared power in Venezuela for 40 years.

But unions remain under opposition control. In October, Venezuela's oil unions went on strike and paralyzed the state oil industry for four days, forcing a reluctant Chavez to give in to nearly all their demands for bigger wages.

Despite income from booming oil prices, Chavez has yet to deliver on promises to pay workers hundreds of millions of dollars in back pay and benefits owed by the government.



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